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C O N F I D E N T I A L CARACAS 000550

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SUBJECT: BRV CALLS DEA "IMPEDIMENT" TO COUNTER-NARCOTICS

REF: CARACAS 000350

Classified By: Daniel Lawton, Acting Political Counselor,
for Reason 1.4(d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Venezuelan Minister of Justice Ramon Rodriguez Chacin called the Drug Enforcement Administration "an impediment" to counter-narcotics and U.S. anti-drug assistance to Colombia a "facade" for destabilizing the region. Chacin made these remarks at an April 18 press conference publicizing the incineration of seized narcotics. Chacin also declared Venezuela was going after the trafficking bosses as well as cartel leaders and claimed drug seizures increased 30% and arrests had tripled over the previous period in 2007 because of improved tactics, not increased trafficking through Venezuela. Post has seen no evidence of more or better BRV counter-drug efforts. END SUMMARY.

SMOKE SCREEN

¶2. (SBU) At an April 18 press conference to promote the incineration of 3.28 metric tons of cocaine and marijuana, Minister of Justice Ramon Rodriguez Chacin announced that the battle against narco-trafficking had "improved considerably since the expulsion of DEA" from Venezuela in 2005. Chacin said "international organizations recognized that DEA was an impediment" to counter-narcotics operations. The Minister stressed that Venezuela was between the world's largest cocaine producer, Colombia, and the world's largest consumer, Europe. Nevertheless, Chacin declared that Venezuela was a transit point for only a "small percentage" of cocaine produced in Colombia. Chacin characterized U.S. anti-drug assistance to Colombia as a "facade" for U.S. intervention in Latin America.

MORE DRUGS OR BETTER TACTICS

¶3. (SBU) Chacin also rejected the argument that seizures had increased because more drugs transited through Venezuela. He called it "ridiculous" to assume that police investigations, training and tactics would remain unchanged and the only variable in the equation was the amount of drugs. Chacin cited that, compared to the first trimester of 2007, narcotics seizures had increased by 36% to 12,450 kilos and arrests had tripled to 1,979. (Note: Statistics from Venezuela's National Anti-Drug Office website do not support these figures. End Note.) Chacin declared that the real fight against narco-trafficking would be against the cartel heads and trafficking bosses, whether they were "members of the government or common citizens." Chacin added that Hemagoras Gonzalez (Reftel) "would never be extradited" until he paid for his crimes in Venezuela.

14. (C) COMMENT: Chacin's comments may be a reaction to ONDCP Director John Walter's efforts in Europe, reported by the local media, to encourage Venezuela to cooperate in multi-lateral counter-drug efforts. Notwithstanding recent efforts to publicize seizures and the destruction of clandestine airstrips, there is little to support Chacin's claim of improved tactics or enhanced efforts to fight drug trafficking. The BRV's largely go-it-alone attitude and widespread corruption make Venezuela an ever more attractive transit country for drug traffickers. End Comment.

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